

SELECTING YOUR RENOVATION EXPERT

Hiring an experienced and knowledgeable renovator is key to a successful renovation project. You are placing what may be the largest asset you own - your home - along with your dreams, in someone else's hands. You are also inviting someone into your life for days, weeks, sometimes even longer. You need to find a renovator you can trust and work well with.

First compile a list of possibilities:

1) Get the names of renovator members of your local Home Builders' Association.

- Solid indication of professionalism.
- Access to training and the latest information on all aspects of renovation
- Agree to the Association's Code of Ethics, which sets out a framework for fair and honest business practices.
 - Beyond that, look to the "Renomark" designation, which includes an even stricter Code of Conduct to which all renovators must adhere

2) Ask for recommendations.

- Check with family and friends, or take a walk around your neighbourhood for renovation projects underway and talk with the homeowners.
- Most people enjoy sharing their renovation experiences.

3) Ask local suppliers and retailers of building materials, products and hardware.

4) Check local advertising.

- Look in your community newspaper for advertisements by established, reputable companies
- Review flyers and other promotional materials that come to your door.

5) "Let your fingers do the walking".

- Search online under renovations, renovation contractors, home improvement, home builders, building contractors and construction for the names of contractors.
- Look for information about the company's expertise, check for logos that indicate the professionalism, and read online reviews
- Keep in mind that anyone can have a website. Make sure you investigate the renovator thoroughly before making any decisions about hiring.

Something to keep in mind... If your renovation project is modest, you may think that the "top" renovators in your community are beyond your budget. This may not be the case. In reality, most companies work on a range of projects, from small- to large-scale renovations.

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Now it's time to meet with them, check references, and evaluate!

During this process, you want to keep the following things in mind:

Presentation. Professional renovators operate in a business-like manner.

- How a renovator deals with you before a contract is signed tells you a lot about how you can expect to be treated once the job begins.
- They respect your schedule and show up for appointments on time.
- They present themselves well, are organized and deal with your questions and concerns directly.
- They earn your confidence because they follow through on promises - if they say they will call you back tomorrow, they do.

Communication. Renovation is a "people business" and good renovators are good listeners and communicators.

- Professional renovators must "translate" your ideas and goals into a workable plan and a pleasant experience.
- This requires a solid working relationship and good rapport.

Skills and experience. Renovating a home can be a far more complex task than building it in the first place. It involves a lot of different types of work, many of which require specialized expertise.

- Whatever the scope and nature of your project, your renovator needs to have solid experience with that type of work.

Professional reputation.

- Established renovators will provide you with references from previous customers.
- They work with a network of other businesses within your community - banks, material suppliers and trades. It's a good idea to ask a renovator for references to any of these people to find out about their reputation within the industry itself.

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With that evaluation criteria in mind, you will set out to:

1) Meet for a consultation

- Ask each renovator to meet with you personally.
- Ask specific questions related to the renovator's business and experience.
- Be prepared to discuss your renovation project in detail.
 - Provide as much information as possible in order to properly evaluate their proposed quote and solutions

2) Check references

- A renovation contractor's past customers are probably the most reliable source of information available to you.
- Each renovator you interview should be able to provide references from previous customers. Ideally, these projects should be similar in scope and scale to yours.
- Ask for testimonials and check third-party review websites to gather information on past clients' satisfaction.
- Also ask about the renovator's current projects and drop by, if you can, to have a look at the job in progress.

3) SELECT YOUR RENOVATOR

- **Don't obsess over bids;** it's more important to find out who you're comfortable with. There's no substitution for a trustworthy relationship with your renovator.
- **Be leery of cash deals;** some contractors may try to persuade you to do an upfront cash deal so that they can save you money by avoiding taxes. But if the contractor takes off before the project is complete, you'll have no protection.
- **Ensure a complete contract;** contracts should clearly lay out several key items:
 - * a bid price and payment schedule
 - * specifics about the scope of work
 - * the site plan
 - * a sequential schedule of primary construction tasks
 - * a change-order clause
 - * a written procedural list for close-out
 - * an express limited warranty
 - * a clause about dispute resolution
 - * a waiver of lien

Most importantly of all, take your time and have fun! This may be a big undertaking, but it should be a fun one as you work to transform your home.